

Resource Management Spotlight:

Goose Reductions at Indiana State Parks



Resident populations of the Canada goose (*Branta canadensis maxima*) have been reaching proportions that have created serious management issues at state parks such as Summit Lake and Potato Creek. Goose waste on beaches, in picnic areas and in bank fishing locations has a negative impact on visitor enjoyment of the park and results in increased operating costs for the property. Eroded shorelines are common as a result of goose grazing. If left unaddressed, the issues involved with these conditions could have adverse long-term effects on the aquatic ecology of different state parks.

The Division of State Parks and Reservoirs is actively managing the problem with controlled goose reductions. This effort is intended as a management tool, used to address the issue of local-breeding, resident geese that would not naturally occur in such high densities. With thorough attention to detail, the focus of these reductions is to be as effective and safe as possible for the sake of the natural resources, reduction participants, and visitors of these areas.

Canada Geese and the Challenges They Present

- Like many species of wildlife, populations of the Canada goose have responded favorably to the modern landscape of fragmented forests, vast agricultural areas, and residential holding ponds and manicured areas.
- Large numbers of resident geese have severely grazed grass and low, woody vegetation from surrounding slopes of lakeshores at both Summit Lake and Potato creek. These denuded or sparsely covered areas are now visibly washing away at rates that far exceed any natural pace. Such erosion and sedimentation threatens water quality and the overall ecology of the lakes at both parks. Another direct potential is the *eutrophication*, or over-fertilizing of the waters from the increase of nitrogen and other chemical nutrients leaching from goose waste near the shore. This results in excessive plant growth and lower available oxygen levels for other aquatic plants and animals.
- Large quantities of goose droppings and feathers in areas are not uncommon. Unfortunately, many of these areas are also family oriented, heavily visited recreation sites such as shelters, concession stands, beaches, and boat docks.



Management History

- Extensive non-lethal management efforts have not been effective. Like many similar areas of the Midwest and eastern U.S., these parks have done a lot in the past to deter geese from finding different areas of the parks favorable. Audible disturbance, including shooting blanks and installing high-decibel distress call producers, has had only a temporary and limited effect.
- Physical disturbance, such as chasing and egg oiling, are very labor intensive and result in limited success. Egg oiling is intended to reduce population growth. Additional deterrent methods have included spraying grass with a commercial non-palatable chemical, and using physical barriers to make access to islands and similar areas seem less appealing to the birds.

Managing the Issue with Goose Reductions

- Reductions are held in the fall and winter. Chosen dates are specifically selected to coincide with hunting seasons, state and federal laws, and to optimize the effectiveness of the effort given the local flight patterns and behavior of the birds. Shooting hours are generally one-half hour before sunrise to sunset. Depending on the dates, participants can take between two and five birds each.
- Parks may be closed to the general public during the reductions or have certain areas restricted. The designated hunting areas at each park are divided with one group of up to four individuals within each area. Dogs, boats and temporary blinds are allowed. Individuals or groups of up to four can arrive the morning of each reduction for a stand-by drawing to fill spots remaining vacant by a certain time. Contact the park of interest for more information.
- Participating individuals are selected using the same drawing method as used for state park deer reductions. Applications are accepted in a defined period, usually in August or September. The online application can be found at www.IndianaOutdoor.in.gov. Successful applicants can bring up to three additional “buddies” for the reductions if they choose. Successful applicants are notified online similar to other IDNR reserved draw hunts a few weeks prior to the first reduction. The main gate generally serves as a check station so properties can obtain harvest numbers. Indiana Conservation Officers are present to ensure compliance of all state and federal laws.
- Other than standard state and federal waterfowl regulations, no shot limits or shell restrictions apply.



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